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# SMOKE

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# *A Postcard From the Volcano*

Children picking up our bones
Will never know that these were once
As quick as foxes on the hill;

And that in autumn, when the grapes
Made sharp air sharper by their smell,
These had a being, breathing frost;

And least will guess that with our bones
We left much more, left what still is
The look of things, left what we felt

At what we saw. The spring clouds blow
Above the shuttered mansion-house,
Beyond our gate and the windy sky

Cries out a literate despair.
We knew for long the mansion's look
And what we said of it became

A part of what it is . . Children,
Still weaving budded aureoles,
Will speak our speech and never know,

Will say of the mansion that it seems
As if he that lived there left behind
A spirit storming in blank walls,

A dirty house in a gutted world,
A tatter of shadows peaked to white,
Smeared with the gold of the opulent sun.

WALLACE STEVENS

# *An Edifice In Time*

In the vast place that is our habitation
where we are lonely in a lonely crowd
and crowded in our lonely isolation
and longing for a different dispensation
longing to live awhile in a different fashion
longing to grow to a more lofty passion
than that to which the spirit of man is tied,
in those tall halls built long since for his spirit
and decorated by time to suit his station
man wanders, consummating loss on loss
throughout its corridors. Each new delusion
betrays him to a new humiliation
and each humiliation to confusion.
And each confusion to a taller cross.

The twisted towers of effort and of care
built by his hurrying hands to typify
the architect's accomplished agony
have struck and stretched and torn the outer air;
his burnished minarets of memory
shine in a wild confusion through the night
and on them at the evening hour of prayer
a crucifer stands in an evening light
and on the highest cross a body hangs
with empty hopes for nails, and for a spear
the empty loves that were its last despair.
This is the house made out of mind and air,
this is the house created out of loss,
this is the tower built of time and care,
this is the pinnacle piled by his spirit,
this is the folly the fool was made to inherit.
And he is bent upon its final cross.

SUSANNA VALENTINE MITCHELL

## *Song Against Abdication*

At least on man's high, sorry face,
Let nature's fury reach compassion.
Claws tear the world, a jungle place
For wily thought that lions fashion.

White mercy is a human star,
That warms a life above the eagle's.
The mind is powerful and far,
To lift its wing beyond the sea gull's.

On higher slopes than wolves devise,
Let people shine in roads of pleasure.
The sun is still a golden prize,
Warm blood the planet's beat and measure.

## *Meditation*

Not far the children shout afield;
Should generations closer death,
Fear ice in formless change congealed,
Bleak silence of a night-held breath?

Say now if stars are pebble-gleams
Gnawed bare by old Leviathan?
Did hunger file those glittered beams
To breed from want voracious man?

What snowy, floating atom flakes
Compose soft brilliance of the moon?
Now, silver-wide, dark pattern breaks,
To lift new faces to the noon.

LINCOLN FITZELL

# *Memory of Forests*

We walk in silence through sodden streets
Thinking on the wind;
and the cold rain,
Falling between grimy towers
Shot with light:
(Patterns woven
Against the bleak darkness).

Your eyes
Are soft in the glint of stone;
Warm with the memory of forests,
And the scent of pine, bare in our nostrils. . . .

There must be many here,
sleeping;
Seen as we pass, in dim hallways,
Bodies racked on steel
Who remember:
The sheen of water, sunlight,
A voice through the trees, the touch
Of supple arms, soft at their face
And the night. . . . .

Here in the shadows the forest rises
Blurred with the dust of years:
the rain
Seeping through worn shoes hangs like a pall:
This is what remains,
this
Is all. . . . .

JOSEPH FRANK

## *Three Fragments*

and after love
the sea will make me new
soothing with salt-sting
wounds your hands have made

thalassa
wine-dark field of graves
what will you tell of death
now gayly dancing
in moonlight

o endless sea
my small blood calls to you
here in the plain by night
remembering waves

## *Four Unfashionable Quatrains*

Death and the Knight ride side by side
Now blameless sings the happy Fool
Our currents struggle with the tide
We contemplate
and mock the Rule

The scholar's scrawl blots out the Word
The penitents munch chocolate creams
Without its sheath now rusts the Sword
The Bull is dead
we know no dreams

More gay the dance
the towers soar
Still glows the Cup
but none have eyes
More lewdly laughs the leering whore
While silently the waters rise

Death and the Fool now mark the way
Fallen the Knight
by his own hand
A timeless darkness seals our day
As ancient seas take back their land

## *Pirates' Pass*

Who sailed in violence the sea
whose waters as shed blood
as glint of gold the wind's caprice

Where now the northward flight
of pelicans is clear low music
above the oratory of waves

"A land so pleasing that a man . . .
"though he were melancholick . . .
"must change his humour."

And in the night as winds sigh
creak of sails where no ship
and echo of forgotten holy war

A lizard lies ensorcelled in the sun
that paints the palm's shape on the sand
(In an old dry book the mark of tears)

As ghosts reproaching previous death
ginbottle crabclaw stove-in waterkeg
make muted wail along the beach

Temperately then, let us be judges
of times passage, reading in dreams
the meaning of lives lost deep in the sea

JAMES LAUGHLIN IV

# *Waste*

Have you forgotten?
This is the place where we rested—
Where the well was damp with coolness, and laughter
Lifted out of the August noon-time.
Yes, it has changed—
Bleakly the houses sleep
As though afraid of the rats, thin scampering,
And perhaps the thunder's distant threat.

Where? . . . But questions are beside the point,
And the road is rank with weeds.
There is no need of roads where the people
Have died or gone away.
The fields are barren, you say,
And last year's corn was never plowed under.

But that is the tragedy of waste,
And the New Deal's frank laughter
For the oppressed.
Gladly we'll stay here a while,
But not too long—
There is something about that door
Slamming in the wind
That is like a voice
Now muted with chill earth.

ALFRED MORANG

# *Obituary*

An old man just has died. ". . . died suddenly,"
Or ". . . after a lingering illness," the papers say:
They print those words and more or fewer words.
Relatives weep. I care as much as they.

As much as they and as casually I care
That a male baby had passed when the naughty child
Grasped through warm shadow in the grape arbor
And crammed down purple fruit: we are reconciled

Contemplating how soon the boy was gone
And that his fibres grew stinging and that he sighed
After flesh; that he was husband or did not marry
And breathed more regularly before he died.

He who went to work works no more at his desk;
(His office chair is not empty,): he is not,—
No longer a steady worker or unsteady.
He crumbled without issue or has begot

Some of his children, the while disintegrating,—
Who dreamed to conquer worlds or to possess
A house in a suburb. Chagrin at partial failures
Is gone with pride in his fractional success.

He has put by his prayers, his etiquette,
His hope, his evening slippers and his digestion;
His certainties have gone blank; his questioning
Is answered in an utter lack of question.

His brain is unflickering. Within his body
Some chemistries augment, some cease to act.
So, moist-eyed, we hang crape to celebrate
This signal reiteration of a fact.

KILE CROOK

# *Strophe (Sic) For a Cracked Bell's Pealing*

If a certain woman had died out of Egypt
Or a bald man not fallen beneath a bust
Would the crumpled wind have come so soon?

—Know the wide, pinioned wings long clipt
And the sagging steel and the flaking rust
And the burned heart by the burned moon.

If the man walking the broken street
Was not a poet with broken shoes
The thunder would not split as loud;

A single face would be the face to meet,
Something the unskilled sight could never lose,
Making an unit of the broken crowd.

—Then he would walk on brick and stone
To find his Una and transcend his lance,
Before the reeking heavens crashed away.

He'd see her standing there alone,
In shoddy green for evening and the dance,
On five and ten cent floors where sailors stay.

Himself, then unencompassed by surprise,
The mounted knight in the lengthy fable,
Could sense the shining portent of his doom,

Staring with blank, distended eyes
Like Rimbaud over a cafe table
Or Hart Crane, drunk, in a Brooklyn room.

# *A Telescope For a Metaphysician*

With cold caves left, the ice disported
Its trickling self, though silver froze;
And higher beasts, uncooled, then courted
The tropic yawn, equatored doze.

This was the climate civilization
Of fading poles, its dust its slave:
Beneath nude boughs a sunless nation
Charted bare segments of the grave,

And sailed dank ships in ocean's streams.
Philosophers, upon the sand,
Let old bones rock in seaweed dreams
Beside a drowned and clutching hand

To where the west rose pyramids
Upon a foreign, desert town,
And victims clawed at eyeless lids
And heads of little girls dropped down

Upon the laps of screaming gods.
Here rested they awhile and thought
Upon the dry and sifting sods
And on those throats the dust had caught.

And when the ship went down, the shields
Spun in the current, depthward fell
To rest at last where darkness wields
The outward parts of nether Hell...

And watched him crawling up the crag,
And watched the sun grow pale and dull,
And saw his sceptre touch the stag
And end upon the gentle skull.

HARRY BROWN

## *Immortality*

Out of the flesh I got me
  To travel light and thin
As shine of the spraying sea
  And luminous in skin.

Out of the commonalty
  That shares a body human,
I slipped me from my skeleton
  And fled the mortal woman.

Now without burden of breast
  And hip and limb and thigh,
Identify me prest
  Naked against the sky.

This is the name I live in,
  And this its bare white being;
And it is free from flesh as wind
  Is free from human seeing.

There is no fabric similar
  No architectural kin;
Anatomy familiar
  Never will vein this skin. . . .

Rasping, the tear of noise,
  From others shriven of flesh:
"Spirit of individual poise
  Now are you freed the mesh

The lineaments of bone;
  Free of the lonely line
And necessary tone
  Identities design.

Now you are one with us.
  Now you can share warm stir;
No longer entity in dust
  But strand of a common blur."

## *O April*

O April, gentle Pioneer,
While yet the western sky is lit,
While yet is need to plant and hoe
And rip the womb of earth in furrow,
Lean idle 'gainst this silver slip
Of beech where sap is streaming slow
And count the moments into hours
And then forget what time to go;
Forget the wilderness beyond
Where is no plot like this to hoe,
Where sorry streamlets trickle on,
Where is no river like this flow;
Forget the necessary pride
That sees the far blue hills a lure;
O be at peace and trim your stride:
This vanishes; that will endure.
Here in this sunlit acre bed
Sing the sweet seed, one seed a day;
Five years will give you this homestead:
There is ripe virtue in delay.
O April, gentle Pioneer,
Acres of wet sunshine lie
On acres of green earth to dry:
Do not impatiently stride by.

DOROTHY COOPER

## *Romantic Nature Poet*

He is the false singer, the twilight walker:
His rhythms sterile, to the deaf stone
To the indifferent wind he cries alone;
Guarding within his jealous, separate blood
Spring's greenest bough, locking the flight
Of birds from all but individual sight.

And year by year men bleed upon this earth,
Starve in the harvest fields, know Spring
In the black coalpits, hear the high looms sing
Through the warped bones of children. Time shall forget
The poet who sees not how the deep root grows
From brotherhood; from calloused hands, the rose.

RUTH LECHLITNER

## *Great Was the Change*

The dust-devouring serpent knew
the maze of Eden through her grass
and shuddered as he touched the dew
that shook to feel his body pass.

Great was the change; the tree still stood:
a tree to be desired and found,
but at the east end of the wood
a fiery sword turned round and round.

Now two were banished from God's sight.
Now wisdom on his belly crept.
Remembrance, like a blinding light,
shot down upon him dusty-red
and at the gate the flame still leapt.
"I do not know myself," he said.

HERMAN SALINGER

# *Summary*

Read this, it has no page in the sky,
though wren and thrush computed there words
for sorrow, for hope, but no answer to the pain
which came through the doors of our houses and
sat in places we had cleared for its stay.

Hold it now as sustenance against
this later fear, old shapes scoured away, new
faces not composed for brittle greying ways;
but over the sill the heads of sunflowers dawn
again where we know the path winds back
only toward that from which we came.

Even one moon and one higher star
could be like horses speeding us on
to a larger time. But this path and
sunflowers nodding. . . No, we must wait
beneath this blank page of sky on which we seek
to spell early words we should have recalled.

Remember? It was at the river, and spikenard
on white shore where the women kept saying: It is
no weather for lambs and singing, but for grey geese.
Recall? Then they sang, but it was the evening song.

DAVID CORNEL DEJONG

## *Escape*

The wise, the brave, can fabricate
A moral selflessness, perhaps;
While dullards have to imitate
The hunter and the wolf he traps,
And suffer vaguely when they find
No pelt, but bloodstains left behind;
Or caught themselves, begin to gnaw
Their flesh, and leave a shredded paw.

Yet weaklings only find themselves
The immorality of dreams,
And prattle secretly with elves,
Who twist the moon among its beams,
Until the stars become the sun
And melted planets quickly run
Their silver into pallid hands,
Which mold the stuff in pretty bands.

"Yet elves," a strutting goblin pimps,
"May capture stars, but not supply
Delights for sale by other imps,
Who teach the witches how to die
Yet live to populate the sky
And graveyards when October frost
Revives the moldered, dead, and lost."

Alone at night the victim sees
Horizons curved on yellow fire
And worms among the roots of trees,
For there he blackens so the pyre
Will dance, and here in soggy clay
The gulping maggots race decay;
Until—no other course from pain,
From sharp perimeters of life,

Distracts his bullet-aching brain
But scolding brother, child, or wife
For blowing fires inside his head
That only thirst for plunging lead.

## *Lazarus*

When Lazarus is dead, he rises
  Where the flower loves the tree;
No metaphysical surprises
  Ease that cold rigidity.

Some smoldering of heart and mind
  May flame in counterpoint or verse,
But even scholars never find
  A broken grave or empty hearse.

For gray, explicit God of hymns,
  The muse of Cowper, Blake, and Smart,
No longer blares for seraphims
  To curl a brain around his heart.

No Jahveh animates abstraction,
  Splits his thunder, opens Hell,
To show Beelzebub in action
  Mining Heaven's citadel.

Nor tells a Jacob how to think,
  In resonance of bulging might,
But languishes in printer's ink
  Or threads the enigmatic night.

Nor lifts the petal, turns the page,
  Nor flakes the rising moon to show
Where man and mystery engage
  And after death our faces go.

W. P. Albrecht

## *Complaint of the Men Who Asked For "Just Plain Facts"*

Gentlemen, gentlemen, how shall a man be able
To prove the proud hydraulics of his blood,
Now everything from naughty name to navel
Has been explained away and understood?

And isn't a wonder if belly-buttoned we,
Ferreting walls and peeping under beds
To rout our fugitive virility,
Sometimes let down our pants to scratch our heads?

HOWARD NUTT

## *Hind-Side-Foremost*

Good neighbors, do not cry at me
    Alarms as I go by;
If I am mad and you are sane,
    Why fret for such as I?

Go—whisper, whisper what you will,
    I care not how you stare—
I put my cart before my horse
    Because I like it there!

EMILY FITZHUGH

# *Hymn*

Give me, I cried, more life, for chased through Life
Hurried, harassed, Lord, I have raced through life
Losing my way, my Soul, in devious dark
Blind alleys, so that now disgraced through life
Blindly and badly led, I swear to Thee
Give me more life, and I will not haste through Life,
But, gloriously live, live in the good,
The great, the wise, wonder, not waste through Life
Like dying planets,—but embraced through life
By life, I shall do all, and taste true life.

So did I pray, and prayed again to Him,
Petitioned and implored in vain to Him:
For having life, I spent it on a dream,
Spent it on little things. Grief, pain to Him
May be. To me that error is like death
To me my life was bitter as a death.
Sin and then only sin. Complain to Him?
No, I have learned by living falsely now
A little to live in truth, then, wane to Him
As the stars fade in light, for all of life,
All leads the Soul in sorrow and pain to Him,
All ways lead up to the light—the path of sorrow
Leads to the light, light is a lane to Him.

LANGDON MITCHELL
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LINCOLN FITZELL — *Song Against Abdication, Meditation*
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one of the younger poets. Lives in Cold Spring, N. Y.

JOSEPH FRANK — *Memory of Forests*
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ALFRED MORANG — *Waste*
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KILE CROOK — *Obituary*
contributed to the early issues of SMOKE.

HARRY BROWN — *Strophe (Sic) for a Cracked Bell's Pealing, A Telescope for a Metaphysician*
won the Young Poet's Prize offered by *Poetry: a Magazine of verse.*

DOROTHY COOPER — *O April, Immortality*
lives in Cincinnati, Ohio.

HERMAN SALINGER — *Great Was the Change*
has appeared in *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, and Voices.*

HOWARD NUTT — *Complaint of the Man Who Asked for "Just Plain Facts"*
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